

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7047

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS, CANAL ZONE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 3074

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, NU

SUBJECT: CONVERSATIONS WITH MILITARY: 3 JULY

SUMMARY: ON 3 JULY, AT A LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE DEFATT, THE AMB AND POLOFF WERE ABLE TO ENGAGE IN A SERIES OF SHORT CONVERSATIONS WITH IMPORTANT LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN). THE CONVERSATIONS FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

1. THE AMB FIRST SPOKE WITH GENERAL IVAN ALEGRETT, GN-3 (OPERATIONS), WHO TLD THE AMB THAT HE (THE AMB) WAS THE ONLY PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT CHAOS AND VIOLENCE IN NICARAGUA. THE AMB REJECTED THIS ARGUMENT, NOTING THAT, WHEN SOMOZA LIFTED THE STATE OF SIEGE (WHICH OCCURRED PRIOR TO AMB'S PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS), AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF NO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PEOPLE EXPRESSED THEMSELVES VEHEMENTLY. WITH CHAMORRO'S ASSASSINATION, THE SITUATION EXPLODED.

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2. ALEGRETT REPLIED THAT CHAMORRO WAS NOT LOVED. THE PROBLEM, HE CONTINUED, IS THAT THE USG IS NOT BACKING ITS FRIENDS (COMMENT: READ GON. END COMMENT) AND THIS ENCOURAGES THE OPPOSITION TO ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW THE GON. THE AMB SAID THAT THERE WAS A CYCLICAL PROPENSITY TO VIOLENCE HERE. THE USG IS TRYING, HE CONTINUED, TO EXERT A MODERATING INFLUENCE AND ENCOURAGE NICARAGUANS TO LIVE

TOGETHER IN PEACE. THE ONLY SOLUTION IS TO ELIMINATE HATREDS, SAID THE AMB, OTHERWISE, DISASTER WILL RESULT. AS EXAMPLES, THE AMB OFFERED GUATEMALA, WHERE PEOPLE ARE BEING KILLED FREQUENTLY, AND CHILE, WHERE BEING HOME BY 1 AM HAS BECOME A WAY OF LIFE DUE TO THE FEAR PERVADING THAT SOCIETY.

3. ALEGRETT AGREED THAT IT WAS USEFUL TO HAVE MODERATING INFLUENCES AND THAT MUCH HATRED EXISTED IN NICARAGUA. THE CONSERVATIVES, HE SAID, HAVE ALWAYS HATED THE GN. SOMOZA GARCIA, FROM THE BEGINNING, DIDN'T WANT THE GN TO ASSOCIATE WITH CIVILIANS. THE CONSERVATIVE OLIGARCHY REINFORCED THIS ISOLATION BY POYCOTTING THE GN (E.G., NOT ADMITTING GN OFFICERS TO PRIVATE CLUBS). THE RESENTMENT FELT AGAINST THE CONSERVATIVES WAS SUCH, ALEGRETT CONTINUED, THAT, YEARS AGO, DURING A "REVOLUTIONARY" UPRISING, AS HE WALKED PAST THE CLUB TERRAZA (A WELL-KNOWN MANAGUA ELITE SOCIAL CLUB), HE FIRED HIS GUNS AT THE BUILDING AS A SIGN OF PROTEST. ALEGRETT SAID HE WAS VERY WORRIED. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT AMNESTY WAS A GOOD POLITICAL MOVE TO KEEP THE OPPOSITION ON THE DEFENSIVE, HOWEVER, WHEN PERON GAVE AMNESTY IN ARGENTINE, CHAOS RESULTED. THIS COULD HAPPEN HERE. ALEGRETT EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER THE FUTURE OF THE GN SHOULD SOMOZA DIE. THE GN WAS INTERNALLY DIVIDED, WITH SOMOZA THE ONLY UNIFYING FORCE. IN A CRISIS, IF THE PRIVATE SECTOR DOES NOT "PACT" WITH
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THE GN, CHAOS WILL RESULT. THE USG MUST HELP, HE CONTINUED, TO OBTAIN SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING. ALEGRETT'S CONCERN STEMMED FROM THE FACT THAT, NEVER BEFORE IN THE HISTORY OF NICARAGUA UNDER THE SOMOZAS, HAD THERE BEEN SUCH A PROLONGED PERIOD OF VIOLENCE AND UNREST. THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE SHOWED THAT THE GN WILL BE THE ULTIMATE VICTIM. POLITICIANS CAN ESCAPE, BUT THE GN WILL BE SHOT. THIS WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN MAINTAINING GN COHESION. SOMOZA MAINTAINED CONTROL OF THE GN BY "CUTTING THE THROATS" OF THOSE WHO SINGLE THEMSELVES OUT AS HAVING A PERSONAL FOLLOWING AND BEING INDEPENDENT. ALEGRETT INDICATED HIS AWARENESS OF THE NECESSITY AND INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE, THEREFORE, HE IS ENCOURAGING THE FEW GN OFFICERS WHO DO SPEAK OUT INTERNALLY. ALEGRETT EXPRESSED HIS GREAT RESPECT FOR GENERAL ARMANDO FERNANDEZ, CHIEF OF STAFF, AND WAS BACKING HIM AS A POSSIBLE NEW GN LEADER. ALEGRETT RECOGNIZED THAT HE (ALEGRETT) WAS TOO CONTROVERSIAL, BUT THAT WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS "MAN WITH BALLS". FERNANDEZ WAS REALLY TO CONSERVATIVE. THE GN WOULD NEED US HELP TO SURVIVE THE COMING CRISIS AND PERIOD OF CHANGE. COMMENT: ALEGRETT IS CONTROVERSIAL AND HIS VIEWS MAY NOT BE FULLY REPRESENTATIVE.

HE IS NOT, HOWEVER, WITHOUT INFLUENCE.

4. THE AMB THEN SPOKE WITH GENERALS JOSE R. SOMOZA, ACTING GN DIRECTOR, AND ARMANDO FERNANDEZ, CHIEF OF STAFF. FERNANDEZ COMPLAINED ABOUT THE COMMUNISTS MAINTAINING AGITATION IN SCHOOLS AND CITIES. SOMOZA AGREED. THE AMB SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT'S POLICY OF NOT SEEKING CONFRONTATION WAS A GOOD ONE. THE GN, HE CONTINUED, REQUIRED PATIENCE. THE OPPOSITION HOPED THAT THE FSLN COULD MOUNT ONE MORE ATTACK AND BREAK THE GN. IF THE GN WITHSTOOD THIS, THE AMB EMPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD ADAPT TO REALITY AND BE WILLING TO NEGOTIATE A POLITICAL SOLUTION. THE AMB MENTIONED "THE TWELVE"-- NOTING THAT, BY AVOIDING CONFRONTATION, MUCH OF THEIR IMPACT WAS DEFUSED. THE
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TWO GENERALS AGREED, WITH SOMOZA ADDING THAT PATIENCE WAS NEEDED.

5. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION, COL. AQUILES ARANDA, GN-5 (LAW AND PUBLIC RELATIONS) TOLD POLOFF THAT GN PLANNED TO AVOID CONFRONTATION RELATED TO THE RETURN OF "THE TWELVE" IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. HE INDICATED THE GN BELIEVES THAT AGITATORS WILL TRY TO PROVOKE AN INCIDENT AND THE GN RESPONSE WILL BE A DIFFICULT DECISION. ANOTHER POINT MADE BY ARANDA IS THAT HIS OFFICE IS ACTIVELY PREPARING INFORMATION RELATED TO ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE MISSING CAMPESINOS, IN PREPARATION FOR AN IAHRC VISIT.

6. COMMENT: THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GN IS CLEARLY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE CURRENT RESTRAINTS ON THEIR REACTION TO AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF GENERALIZED PROTEST AND ANTI-GON ACTIVISM. HOWEVER, THEY APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND THE POLICY AND ITS MOTIVATION. THEY SEE THE USG AS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT THEY VIEW AS HAVING ONE HAND TIED BEHIND THEIR BACK AS WELL AS THE NEW ACTIVISM OF OPPOSITIONISTS. THEY APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO HOPE THEY CAN CONVINCE US THAT UNLESS US POLICY IS CHANGED, THE RESULT WILL BE CHAOS AND COMMUNISM.
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